



## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 14-0970, **Version:** 1

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Recommendation to request City Manager and City Attorney to return in 90 days with a draft ordinance making it mandatory for dog owners to spay or neuter their pets unless they possess a medical exclusion or breeding permit from the Department of Parks, Recreation and Marine, Animal Care Services Bureau;

Request City Manager to include recommendations for supporting the successful introduction and implementation of the Mandatory Spay & Neuter Ordinance, including but not limited to public education, spay/neuter vouchers, mobile services and enforcement through administrative citations and license canvassing; and

Request City Attorney to draft an ordinance making it unlawful to sell dogs, cats or rabbits in any pet shop, retail business, or other commercial establishment, unless they were (1) obtained from the city animal shelter, humane society, or nonprofit rescue organization or (2) bred on the premises possessing a breeding permit.

With ongoing support from City Council, city management and a passionate animal care community, Animal Care Services (ACS) has made significant strides to care for and manage our City's owned and free-roaming animal populations. Our common goal is to reduce the number of animals euthanized every year by increasing responsible pet ownership, return-to-owner rates, pet adoptions and spay/neuter services. To this end, legislative actions taken by City Council in 2007 and 2009 resulted in the expansion of low-cost spay & neuter services, volunteer and enforcement programs, mobile clinics, microchipping, cat licensing and creation of a full-time Licensed Veterinarian position, which has improved the health and adoption rates of animals in the Village. Such initiatives had a dramatic impact on our animal population in 2013, as the total number of animals impounded and euthanized were the lowest in 25 years, return-to-owner numbers were the highest in 6 years and the percentage of dogs and cats finding homes jumped by more than 25%. The attached staff reports detail the actions taken and achievements experienced by Animal Care Services.

Even with the good work of our ACS and community partners, more pro-active measures can and should be taken to reduce pet overpopulation and irresponsible pet ownership. To illustrate this point, ACS impounded approximately 4,440 dogs in 2013, which works out to be 12 dogs per day, seven days per week. Of that total, approximately 1 in 4 were puppies and a vast majority was unaltered. Of the dogs impounded, 60% were either returned to their owner, adopted or transferred to rescues.

Currently, owners may obtain a permit for their unaltered dog, but only in cases of medical exclusions (certified by a veterinarian that the dog cannot be safely altered) or for an AKC

Certified show dog (must show proof). Dog owners who choose to keep illegally unaltered pets increase the risk of accidental litters when their dog gets out of the yard or mates with another dog in the yard. Another notable segment of animals impounded by ACS are those coming from illegal backyard breeding that have been dumped in our city's parks or on our streets. Tragically, some female pit bulls are bred for only one litter before being dumped by their owner in favor of a younger female in the litter.

By requiring dogs to be spayed/neutered, the City of Long Beach is sending a clear message to its residents that irresponsible ownership will not be tolerated, and we are providing Animal Care Services Bureau with another effective tool for motivating dog owners. We believe the ordinance will decrease the "give-aways" of unplanned litters to family members, friends and neighbors. Abandonment, strays and ferals will also decrease. Not to mention the health benefits for dogs in receiving veterinarian attention and females in particular, by reducing their risk of mammary and ovarian cancer, infection and stress. Lastly, ACS will have more kennel and cattery space, which will allow them to house animals longer for potential adoption.

In 2010, City Council adopted an ordinance requiring cats to be licensed, adding another tool for ACS to use in addressing the large number of cats impounded each year. The prevailing wisdom being that cats are just as important to their owners as dogs to theirs, so each should be treated with the same value and appreciation by ACS and our municipal code. However, in our current municipal code, we require cats to be spayed/neutered, but not dogs. If the predominant numbers of impounded dogs are unaltered, it makes sense for the City to mandate alteration while expanding its partnerships and role in providing low-cost spay/neuter services to its residents.

In 2013, ACS and its partners provided vouchers or performed alterations for over 3,000 animals. This does not include the number of animals spayed or neutered at standard cost in one of 23 local veterinary hospitals/clinics. To be sure, Long Beach is extremely fortunate to have several passionate and dedicated partners and veterinarians working to reduce euthanasia and pet overpopulation - among them are Friends of Long Beach Animals, who fund and distribute vouchers and Fix Long Beach, who offer free spay/neuter services in their mobile unit. It is also worth noting that the City expects to have its own clinic at the ACS Village open in the near future.

The cost of a spay/neuter procedure can range from (\$40 - \$500) at a veterinarian hospital/clinic. Vouchers from Friends of Long Beach Animals cover the entire cost of the procedure at their contracted clinic for residents requiring financial assistance. Using funding from Hope 4 Paws, ACS and other groups, Fix Long Beach provides free spay/neuter services to residents. ACS also provides \$30 vouchers to assist with the cost of spay/neuter procedures at several local clinics.

We encourage the City Manager to identify additional revenue sources, donors and grants to expand the already successful low-cost spay/neuter voucher program. However, we also

believe that proper veterinary care such as check ups and spay/neuter are functions of responsible pet ownership and should be factored into an individual's decision to own a pet. There are lessons to be learned from other municipalities and our own animal care community, so we would like staff to include them in their research and recommendations.

No immediate fiscal impact. Costs for implementation and enforcement will be included in staff's recommendations.

Approve recommendation.

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COUNCILMEMBER, SECOND DISTRICT

SUZIE PRICE  
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